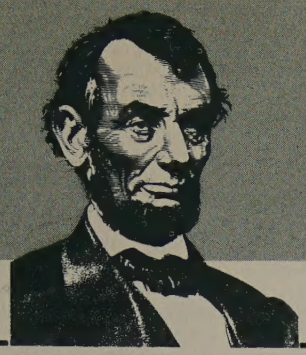

Lincoln Lore

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SOME CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING A MISSING COPY OF THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

The February 1894 issue of the *Century Magazine* contained an article by John G. Nicolay entitled "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address." This well written and factual account of one of the most important and dramatic episodes of Lincoln's life created considerable interest in 1894 and is today considered an important reference source by a reputable historian.

John Nicolay illustrated his article with a facsimile of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address which consisted of twenty-nine lines. This copy of the original address appears on two sheets of paper and was the one believed to be held in Lincoln's hand during its delivery. The first page of the manuscript was written in ink on a sheet of the White House letter paper, and was carried by Lincoln in his pocket when he went to Gettysburg. The second part was written with a pencil on a bluish-foolscap paper, at Gettysburg, in the house of Judge David Wills, on the morning of the day the address was delivered.

On January 19, 1894 Judge Wills, having heard that Nicolay was writing an article about the Gettysburg Address, wrote him as follows: "Judge McClean told me last evening that it was announced that you were preparing an article on Mr. Lincoln's address at Gettysburg. Years ago I wrote out the facts I knew about it and they were published in some of the newspapers. My family was fully acquainted with these facts (Mrs. W. now being dead) and Mr. DuBarry the Genl. Supt. of the N. C. R. R. who brought Mr. Lincoln to Gettysburg in his car and was with him from the time he left Washington until he reached here and stayed with me all the time Mr. Lincoln was with me. I send you the enclosed which may give you some light."

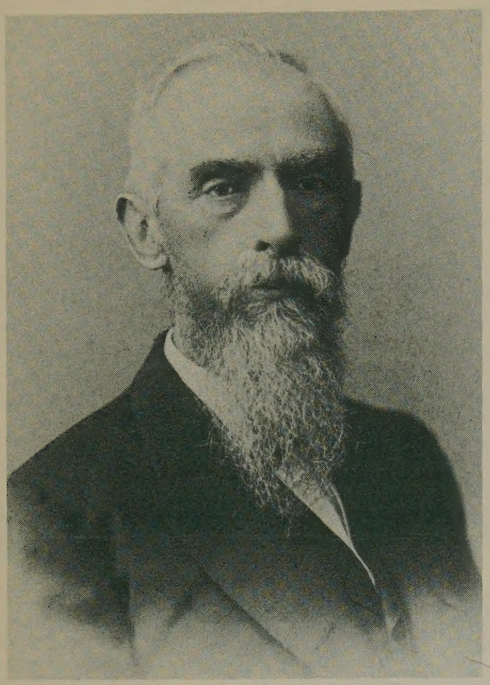
Lincoln and his Secretaries
Meserve No. 56

A photograph, with the background painted in, made by Alexander Gardner on November 8, 1863. John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary is seated to the President's right and John Hay, the assistant private secretary is shown standing to the President's left. The artist placed spectacles in Lincoln's hands, while Nicolay holds a quill pen, items not appearing in the original photograph.

The enclosed typewritten article signed by Wills follows:

"I was President of the Soldiers' National Cemetery Association at Gettysburg, having organized the Association in July 1863, shortly after the Battle.

"I had charge of all the arrangements for the dedication of the Cemetery, and it was on my official invitation that President Lincoln came to Gettysburg on that occasion. Edward Everett, who had been selected to deliver the oration, preceeded the President several days, and was my guest. I also invited the President to my house and he arrived there on the evening of the 18th of November, 1863. After spending part of the evening in the parlors he retired to his room. He had his colored servant, William, with him. Between nine and ten o'clock the President sent his servant to request me to come to his room. I went and found him with paper prepared to write, and he said that he had just seated himself to put upon paper a few thoughts for the to-morrow's exercises, and had sent for me to ascertain what part he was to take in them, and what was expected of him. After a full talk on the subject I left him. About eleven o'clock he sent for me again, and when I



John G. Nicolay
September 16, 1891
Photograph made by Charles Parker, 477 Penn Ave., Washington, D.C.

went to his room he had the same paper in his hand, and asked me if he could see Mr. Seward. I told him Mr. Seward was staying with my neighbor, next door, and I would go and bring him over. He said 'No, I'll go and see him.' He went and I went with him and Mr. Lincoln carried the paper on which he had written his speech with him, and we found Mr. Seward and I left the President with him. In less than half an hour Mr. Lincoln returned with the same paper in his hand. The next day I sat by him on the platform when he delivered his address, which has become immortal, and he read it from the same paper on which I had seen him writing it the night before. He afterwards made a copy of it, of which I have a *fac simile* and have had a photograph of it taken. There are but two or three changes in this copy from that as taken by the stenographers on the day it was read from the platform."

As early as September 10, 1885, Judge Wills had written to Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of the *Century* his recollection of Mr. Lincoln's Gettysburg visit:

"I have several times seen the statement in print that Mr. Lincoln wrote his Gettysburg speech on the cars on the way from Washington to Gettysburg, and as this is not the fact I propose to write an article for your journal and give all the facts about it.

"Mr. Lincoln was my guest when here on that occasion and the speech was written here in my house and I am familiar with all the facts about its preparation, as I was president of the Soldiers National Cemetery which he came here to assist in dedicating. He conferred with me all about it. I know all about its preparation and all he said to me about it.

"Besides I have a *fac simile* of a copy of the speech which he afterwards made and which I could have photographed so that it would be lithographed and inserted in your magazine with that article. This would also give the public an exact copy of the speech because there are slightly different variations of it published.

"Shall I prepare such an article and will you publish it?"

As an afterthought Wills added this (postscript) "Ex-Gov. Curtin knows the speech was written in my house as he was here at the time."

Mr. Gilder apparently submitted to Nicolay the Wills letter of September 10, 1885. Nicolay answered Gilder in a letter dated September 19, 1885:

"The other letter (from Mr. David Wills) is of more interest. It is true that Mr. Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg address (but in part only) in his house. The original ms. is now lying before my eyes. Half of it is written with ink on a half sheet of letter paper; this the president wrote in Washington and brought in his pocket. The other half in pencil, on a half sheet of foolscap (diplomatic size); this he wrote in Mr. Wills house, and I was with him at the time. The copy which Mr. Wills has is one of several, of the revision which Lincoln made after his return to Washington. I have also the ms. notes of the revision before me.

"Mr. Wills therefore is not familiar with *all* the facts; all that he has which is new is probably only *what he recollects* that Mr. Lincoln said to him. This might or might not be useful in completing or rounding out our knowledge—it will probably add nothing very material.

"(In your reply to Mr. Wills do not give him my data. You may use your judgment as to the advisability of bringing out his.)"

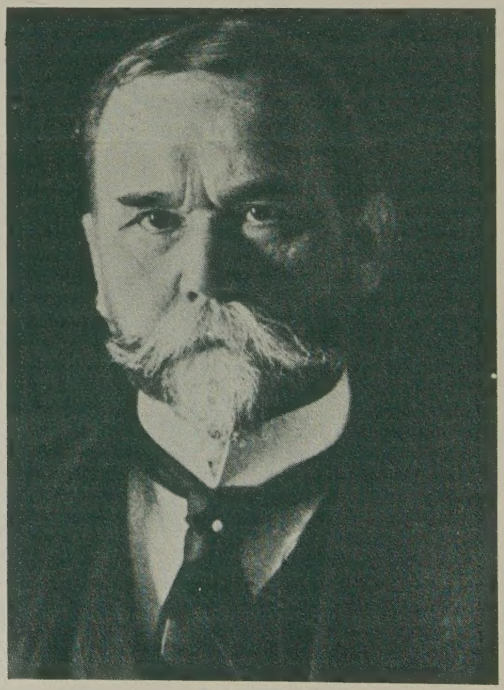
On January 20, 1894 Nicolay acknowledged Judge Wills' letter:

"Accept my sincere thanks for your kind note of the 19th inclosing your account of incidents relating to Mr. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

"My twenty years experience of somewhat minute examination and criticism of war history has deeply impressed upon me the conviction how liable we all are to error in our recollection of detailed incidents which occurred thirty years ago. Of course all that any of us can do is to honestly state our impressions and the written contemporary record is the only reliable arbiter of differences.

"My account relating to the Gettysburg address will, I believe be printed in the coming February number of the *Century*. I think you will find upon a careful reading of it that there is no necessary inconsistency between what I have there written and your relation in your inclosure. Your account relates to what occurred in the evening, and mine relates to what occurred next morning. Both may be substantially true, except that perhaps Mr. Lincoln in the evening only made hasty notes of the closing portion of his address, which he copied more deliberately in my presence next morning."

As Nicolay had been one of Lincoln's private secretaries everyone surmised that read the article that the "battlefield copy" of the Gettysburg Address which was reproduced in the February 1894 issue of *Century* was the property of the author—a gift from the Sixteenth President.



John Hay
November, 1904

There the matter of the whereabouts of the original manuscript rested until after Nicolay's death on September 27, 1901, when an unsuccessful search was made for the valuable document.

On October 31, 1908 General James Grant Wilson wrote to Miss Helen Nicolay, the daughter of the distinguished author:

"May I be permitted to ask who is the fortunate possessor of the precious original manuscript of the Gettysburg address at present. I understand, in your keeping? My purpose in making the inquiry is to learn if it can be obtained for a Lincoln Loan Exhibition, contemplated by the Centenary Committee appointed by the mayor of New York, of which Mr. Joseph H. Choate is the chairman. If for any reason, the owner of the priceless relic does not desire his or her name made public, it may be confided to me confidentially, and with a view to preferring the above mentioned request. The celebration occurs in Feby. 1909. Is my impression correct, that Mr. Lincoln's address is written in ink on two half sheets of white note paper?"

On November 3, 1908, Helen Nicolay answered General Wilson with the following letter:

"I very much wish I could answer your question as to the whereabouts of the original ms. of the Gettysburg Address. It was given by Mr. Lincoln to my father, and should now belong to me as his heir.

"When a search was made for it after my father's death it could not be found. My impression is that it was put inadvertently among the mss. which did not belong to my father but were only in his custody. They were returned to their owner the Hon. Robert Lincoln shortly after my father's death.

"I did not know at that time the Gettysburg ms. belonged to my father personally but was told so by Secretary Hay several weeks after the transfer had been made. The boxes containing the mss. were then stored at the State Dept. and I asked him to have the search made—which as before stated was fruitless.

"For obvious reasons I hesitated to go to Mr. Robert Lincoln after the boxes were sent to him, and ask to be allowed to go through them myself.

"I am still hoping to find the precious ms. among my father's papers—but as yet its whereabouts is a mystery.

"I enclose a copy of my father's article on the Gettysburg Address which answers the question you ask about the paper on which it was written."

Three days after Helen Nicolay wrote General Wilson, Robert T. Lincoln addressed a letter to her dated November 6, 1908:

"We are having a good many inquiries at this time about matters relating to my father; and I venture to trouble you to ask whether you know where the original manuscript of the Gettysburg Address is, which your father used in "The Century" article in February, 1894, which I recently had reprinted as you know. He must have had it at the time, because there are lithographic copies of the two separate parts of the address."

In answer to Robert Lincoln, Helen Nicolay wrote on November 9, 1908: "I do not know where the original ms. of the Gettysburg Address is. It is a mystery that has puzzled and distressed me for a long time. Now that you have asked me I am going to tell you the whole story.

"As you are aware the Lincoln mss. were in my father's custody at the time of his death. As soon as possible thereafter I turned them over to Sec. Hay to be restored to you.

"I did not at that time know, what Mr. Hay told me shortly after the transfer was made—that your father gave my father the original ms. of the Gettysburg Address—and that it was therefore his private property. I immediately searched among his papers but failed to find it. I had, from the moment of Mr. Hay telling me, an impression more or less indistinct of finding an important Lincoln ms. (which one I cannot say) in a place apart from the rest—thinking it was out of its place and putting it with the others.

"I told Mr. Hay this, and asked him (he having the keys to the boxes which were then at the State Dept.) to have a search made. How thorough his search was, I have no means of knowing. It resulted in nothing.

"After the boxes were returned to you, (I) naturally hesitated to go to you and ask to be allowed to go through the boxes in the hope of extracting one of the most valuable documents. So the matter has rested just there. Every time I work among my father's papers I hope to find it—and failing that I hope it is in your possession.

"I am very glad of a chance to tell you how the matter stands."

Robert Lincoln replied to Miss Nicolay on November 12, 1908:

"I have your note of November 9th, and am very sorry indeed to learn that you do not know where the original manuscript of the 'Gettysburg Address' now is. While I did not know it, I supposed, what you tell me, that my father had given it to your father. I did not wish, of course, in any way to obtain it for myself, but I thought it might be an interesting object in the temporary exhibition which is to be made in New York City on the anniversary of his birth next year.

"It is of course a very interesting paper among those connected with my father's history, and I am very sorry that it cannot now be found. As I have been a number of times in communication with Mr. Gilder of the Century Company about various matters, I have therefore written him a letter, which I enclose to you, and which explains itself. If you approve of its going forward, I beg that you will kindly post it. It may be that in that way it can be traced. It would seem perfectly clear that the Century people must have had it to make the lithographic copies, and as I have said to Mr. Gilder, their files ought to show what they did with it afterwards, as it is not likely that your father transacted the business with them orally.

"The papers that you sent Mr. Hay have been in my possession here (Chicago) for a good while, and have been gone over, as it is thought, piece by piece, and I am assured that that particular document is not among them. I do not need to assure you that if in the course of further examinations it is found, it will be considered as belonging to you; but I have little hope of such good fortune."

Among the many original letters and documents pertaining to the Gettysburg Address in the Foundation collection, there is no copy of Robert Lincoln's letter to Richard Watson Gilder, which the President's son requested Miss Nicolay to read, and if it met with her approval, to post.

Miss Nicolay replied to Robert Lincoln on November 16, 1908:

"This morning I received your letter of November 12, and mailed its enclosure to Mr. Gilder.

"Since then I have been looking through the envelopes of my father's correspondence with the Century Co. to

Gettysburg Oration

"We can but bow the head, with eyes grown dim
And as a *Nation's Litany* repeat
The phrase his martyrdom hath made complete
Noble as then, but now more sadly sweet."

BAYARD TAYLOR

Gettysburg Ode July 1, 1869 Home Pastoral 187.

see if possibly I could find some trace at this end of the sending back and forth of the ms. Gettysburg Address. The only thing I found was a single sentence in a letter of Mr. C. C. Buel dated October 30, 1893 in which he said 'I now send proofs of the fac simile of the draft of the Gettysburg Speech.'

"So it appears to have been in New York at that time. Of course the Century Co's. record will be much more complete, and from that we will learn when it was returned.

"I cannot believe that the ms. is permanently lost. If it is among my papers or yours it will of course come to light—and if it has been stolen, it is too important a document to remain hidden indefinitely.

"I only hope for all our sakes, that the mystery will soon be cleared up."

Meanwhile the Century Company, upon receiving Robert Lincoln's letter, posted about the middle of November, instituted a search through their records for some clue as to the disposition of the valuable manuscript. Their conclusion was that they never at any time had possession of the original document. R. W. Gilder wrote Robert Lincoln expressing that idea on November 20, 1908:

"Yours of November 18th is at hand and I hasten to say that we know of the letter of 'October 30th' of Mr. Buel and have examined five others from him, but there is nothing in them that indicates that we had the *original* in our possession. The *fac simile* of the draft is referred to and never the original manuscript, nor can the art department find any record of our ever having had the original. If we did, it certainly must have been immediately sent back.

"Mrs. Marshall, the lady who had charge, at that time, of the artistic materials under Mr. Drake, is quite sure that if so important a manuscript had passed through her hands she would remember it.

"We cannot tell whether a facsimile was made from a photograph or from the original. The art department believes that it was from a photograph sent to us by Mr. Nicolay."

Gilder, a day later, (November 21, 1908) wrote Helen Nicolay, and among other things stated: "We have made a . . . search here for the Gettysburg speech and find only letters referring to the facsimile of the draft and the art department seems to think we never had anything but a photo from your father—or that if we had the original it must have been at once put again in his hands. I don't believe he ever sent it to us. We have written Mr. Robert Lincoln to this effect."

Miss Nicolay replied to Mr. Gilder on November 23, 1908:

"I am very sorry the Century search for a trace of the Gettysburg ms. has come to nought. Of course I knew your office did not have the ms.—but I hoped something would be found that might shed light upon the mystery—which, as you can imagine, troubles me deeply."

Robert Lincoln, by this time was at a loss to know how to further proceed, and he wrote Miss Nicolay on November 23, 1908:

"I have to-day two letters from Mr. Gilder of the Century Company in regard to the missing manuscript, and I send you a copy of the latest (see Gilder to Lincoln, November 20, 1908).

"I am told that the paper is certainly not among those which came to me from the State Department, and I therefore am at a loss in what way to suggest any further search."

The next development in the search for the missing manuscript was when Mrs. John Hay, the wife of the late Secretary of State, mistakenly thought she had solved the mystery. An original copy of the Gettysburg Address was found in her husband's papers. Apparently the first persons informed were Miss Nicolay, Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Gilder. Thereupon Miss Nicolay wrote Robert Lincoln on December 2, 1908:

"Mrs. Hay tells me she has written you about finding the Gettysburg Address.

"I need not tell you how relieved at its discovery I am. The manner of its discovery shows I was all wrong in my belief that it was given to my father. It was evidently another manuscript to which Mr. Hay referred in the conversation I wrote you about.

"I am distressed that I should have made such a mistake even unintentionally."

On December 7 Clara S. Hay wrote: "Dear Helen—I just sent you a rough draft of my letter to Mr. Gilder. I have not had time to copy it. I hope I have sufficiently eaten humble pie."

On December 7, 1908, Mr. Gilder had an occasion to write a business letter to Helen Nicolay, and without any allusion to the missing address he said: "There is nothing like getting things right. Trust a Nicolay for that."

This statement immediately elicited a reply (December 8, 1908) from Miss Nicolay:

"If you (Mr. Gilder) had mailed your note to me a few hours later I fear you would not have written 'trust a Nicolay for that ie. getting things right.' But please in spite of appearances keep on trusting a Nicolay for *wanting* and meaning to get things right.

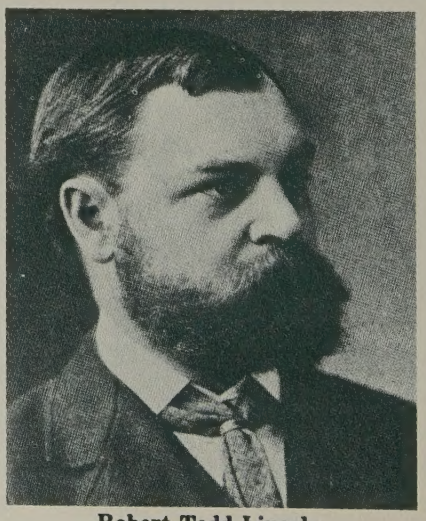
"Mrs. Hay's letter telling you in confidence about the finding of the Gettysburg ms. must have reached you this morning. I wrote a letter to you on the same subject the moment she told me of its discovery—but at her request did not send it (note: a rough copy of this letter dated December 8, 1908 is in the Foundation files) as she seemed to prefer not to tell anybody else until she had heard from Robert Lincoln. When she found out yesterday how very much I had the matter at heart, she wrote to you at once sending me a copy of her letter after she had mailed it. It was sweet and generous of her, but the dear lady has missed the very central point, so far as my relation to the matter is concerned.

"This of course is that I have told you and Mr. Robert Lincoln and General Wilson as a positive fact something that this discovery proves to be wrong. Of course I did it in good faith and up to the moment of the finding of this ms. bound like the other Lincoln mss. owned by Mr. Hay I was absolutely certain of my statement about the missing Gettysburg Address—which was in substance this; 'At the time of my father's death the Lincoln mss. were in his custody, as soon thereafter as possible I turned them over to Sec. Hay to be sent on to Robt. Lincoln. Shortly after this Mr. Hay asked me about a valuable ms.—saying it was my father's private property. I told him I had none of the Lincoln mss.—that I had found one or two apart from the rest, and thinking they were out of place had put them with the others.' The mss. were then at the State Dept. awaiting Mr. Robt. Lincoln's orders. I asked Mr. Hay to have a search made for the ms. but nothing came of it. I have thought all these years, that the ms. he referred to was the Gettysburg Address. This find of Mrs. Hay's proves that to have been impossible.

"I now have no clue to what ms. it was—and no assurance that my friends of the Century, and others to whom I have told this tale will ever believe anything I say again. My poor little reputation for historical accuracy seems to have gone to the winds.

"May I rely on you as a friend to think the best you can of me?"

(To be continued in the December, 1957 issue.)



Robert Todd Lincoln